The Name They Have Forgot!

By Helen Finch Kasson

DEDICATED

TO

ELBERT HUBBARD

THE NAME THEY HAVE FORGOT!

By

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CHARACTERS

Traveler	Second Soldier
Pedler	Third Soldier
Peg	Soldiers
Woman at Inn	Child
First Soldier	Baby

Time : *The Present Day*

ACT ONE

THE action takes place late one afternoon in Summer in the taproom of Bosworth Inn. The room is scantily furnished, with two worn tables and several benches — the three uncurtained windows, through which the sun streams, making vivid the only color in the room: the pots of red geranium on the window-sills. At the right, there are several kegs against the wall; over them is a shelf, on which rows of stone mugs are orderly arranged. A wooden-case clock, several prints, and a small table on which is an ink-bottle are the sole ornaments. At the left is a door, leading into the street; at the back, a door leading into an inner room.

At one of the tables a Pedler is sitting, a man of forty, with ruddy, honest, smooth-shaven face. Half-aloud he counts his money, which he is slowly taking from his leather wallet. The street door opens, the Traveler enters, a man of thirty-seven, slight, straight, coarse-clad in a strange shapeless garment, carrying a staff. Hesitating, he looks about.

PEDLER

[*Looking up and cautiously closing his wallet, returning it to his pocket*]

How 're you, traveler!

TRAVELER

[*Exhausted, throwing himself on bench, nods*]

PEDLER

Come from far?

TRAVELER

[*Smiling sadly*] Yes, and going farther.

PEDLER

Humph! you 're 'bout beat out now! [*Pause*] Peddlin'? Hard 'nough when you 're carryin' takin' stuff, but when you ain't, worse 'an that. Sleepin' out o' nights, nothin' to eat. [*Sympathetically*] I 've been there myself. [*Filling his pipe*] What 're you peddlin'? [*Lighting his pipe*]

TRAVELER

[*Lifting his head*] I am not peddling; I am giving away.

PEDLER

[*In astonishment*] Givin' away? Givin' away? [*Chuckling, rubs his hands, slowly comprehending*] Oh! I see, advertisin'! Well! what 're you advertisin'?

TRAVELER

[*Measuring his words*] What the world most needs.

PEDLER

[*Curiously*] I guess that ain't agreed. There might be some arguin'.

TRAVELER

Yes, much arguing ; for as children, eyes shut with crying, they push aside the thing for which they weep.

PEDLER

[*Rapping on table, a woman enters, evidently the innkeeper's wife; a child is clinging to her skirts. Pedler turning to the woman*] Two pots, brimful, for we 're bone-dry.

[*The woman shuffles to the kegs, draws two mugs of ale, and deposits them on the table in front of the Pedler. The child eyes the traveler curiously.*]

Draw up and drink ! Why, man, your empty belly has made emptier your brain.

[*The street door opens and Peg enters. She is a pretty girl of the streets, about eighteen years, poorly clad. The child runs joyously towards her.*]

PEDLER

[*Pushing the mug towards the Traveler*] Ain't you dry?

TRAVELER

[*Sadly and slowly*] That could not quench my thirst.

PEDLER

[*Disgusted, taking up his mug, notices Peg, who is standing near him*] Hello there, Peg! You here? [*Pointing to the other mug*] You won't let ale go beggin', eh?

PEG

[*Coming to Pedler and reaching for the mug, meets the gaze of the Traveler. She hesitates, whispering to the Pedler.*] Who 's he?

PEDLER

Oh! just a pedler like myself. Here, drink girl!

PEG

[*The earnest gaze of the Traveler making her uneasy*] I ain't thirsty. Down it yourself—you can hold it. [*Turns to caress the child*]

THE WOMAN

[*Who has been intently listening in conversation*] You 're a fool, Peg ! That 's what you are—a fool. Do you think we 're goin' to stand for this? What can we make from you, with your nice ways o' late? [*Excitedly*]Out in the street for you—out ! [*Peg, ceasing patting the child's hair, slowly turns towards the door*] And you [*Addressing the Traveler*] —you, are you goin' to eat and sleep here?

TRAVELER

I have no money, Woman.

THE WOMAN

[*Fiercely*] Then pack out, the two o' you ! A pair o' you, worthless truck I call you.

[*The Traveler, picking up his staff, starts to follow Peg towards the street door, when the door is suddenly burst open and a crowd of Soldiers rush in, laughing and talking.*]

FIRST SOLDIER

[*Talking above the others*] It 's been a hell of a wait, boys ; but we 're off, off at last ! Here, Mother,

[*Turning to the Woman*] don't stand gaping at us when our tongues are stuck to our throats. [*The Woman, hurrying to the shelf, takes down mugs and begins to fill them.*]

SECOND SOLDIER

[*Speaking to First Soldier, and pointing to Traveler*] That 's him ! That 's the man !

THIRD SOLDIER

Yes ; that 's the guy that spoke in the square.

FIRST SOLDIER

[*Turning towards Peg and Traveler; the street door having been locked by the soldiers, they had been unable to pass into the street.*] So you 're the man, are you? Well ! How goes your peace rot? [*General laughter*] Did you get any converts among the toothless old women and toddling children?

[*The Woman returns with the mugs, and Peg, timidly taking the Traveler's hand, attempts to pass into the street.*]

Here, Peg, cut it out ! Don't sulk out—stand by, like the sport you are ! He 's going to toast for us.

[*With a great flourish, offering the mug to the Traveler*] Now do your prettiest. Give us a real good one, like you gave on the square.

PEG

[*Snatching the mug from the Soldier's hand and jumping on the table*] He don't know how to toast—best let 'im alone, boys. Here 's to [*Raising her mug*]—Here 's to [*Peg's voice is drowned by the shout of one of the soldiers*] Hell with peace! [*Bursts of laughter as the "To Hell with Peace" is hilariously repeated*]

ACT TWO

PEG'S room. The hearth on the left, a bare table, two chairs, a cupboard, an old bed and a box in one corner complete the furnishings, which are hardly discernible in the dusk. A window, on the right, overlooks a church in the street below. Door on left.

Peg and the Traveler enter. Peg knocks over a chair in searching for matches, which are on the hearth-shelf. Finding them, she strikes one, and lights a candle, which she takes from the mantel.

PEG

[*Shoving a chair in front of the hearth, the Traveler sits down.*] Sit down ! I 'll get the fire goin' in just a minute. [*Lighting fire on hearth and fanning it with her skirt*] It 's cold for June. You 're cold, ain't you? [*Noticing the Traveler, whose head is buried in his hands*] Say, you 're sick?

TRAVELER

[*Raising his head*] Sick? Yes—Soul sick ! Soul sick !

PEG

[*Perplexed, rising and going towards the cupboard*]

When you 've eaten you 'll feel better. [*Taking from cupboard, bowls, loaf of bread and a pitcher. Peering in cupboard.*] There ain't much. [*Looking about*] but I ain't hungry. [*Bringing things to the table*] Here 's bread and milk. Eat ! You 're starvin' —that 's what ails you. [*Traveler rising goes to table*] Starved—own up, ain't you? Down and out, discouraged, world 's against you, eh?

TRAVELER

Yes, you are right ; I am starved and more—more. [*Closing his eyes and passing his hand across them*] Hungering for which I came and found not. [*Sitting down at table, while Peg cuts the bread. She looks into the milk-pitcher, pouring out some milk, then stops.*]

PEG

There ; I guess that 'll be enough for it, and that 's for you [*Pushing bowl towards him. Traveler begins to eat. Peg, going to old box in the corner by the bed, peeps in.*] Bless it, sleepin' ! Ain't even stirred, have you? [*Tiptoeing back to Traveler*] Wait 'till it cries ! It 's like a little bird a' callin'. And wait 'till you see its little hand ! It 's like a flower-petal in my rough 'un. And bless it, when it smiles ! [*Clasping*

her hand] But I told you about the smile; [*Perplexed*] no, I ain't; but its smile is just like that smile. 'T was last week, I sat a' rockin' and a 'singin' to it, and it went sound asleep, and I sat there a' holdin' it, so, 'till I fell off, too. I dreamed I was n't alone here; 't was as if there was people talkin' all 'round me and a' movin' in the room; and they talked, like people do talk when a baby ain't no father to stand by it, and point at you and laugh, and you hate 'em; and I felt as if I could kill 'em, all of 'em, throwin' their goodness, which ain't cost 'em nothin', in my face. And it screamed [*Laughing*]—I 'd hugged it so hard. Bless it! It woke up, and cried; and I was a' cryin', too, harder 'en it, when I see a man beside me. His hand was on my shoulder, and he looked at me and smiled, just smiled, and then —— [*A cry from the box in the corner. Peg jumps up, hastens to it and carefully lifts out a baby, well wrapped in shawl.*] There, was it hungry, was it? Don't you worry! Peg 's got its supper, you hold it. [*Thrusting the baby into Traveler's arms*] Don't drop it—careful! See! [*Joyously*] It knows I ain't holdin' it, ain't it lovely, ain't it? [*Peg pours milk into saucepan, holding it over fire, and anxiously watching the child.*]

TRAVELER

Why do you call the baby "It"?

PEG

I ain't ever found a name that just suited me. I wanted somethin' awful happy, like she 's made me since she come. She 's made me forget—she has—him ; he was a soldier. I wanted somethin' that was just her own, not Jenny or Kate or anythin'. [*Snatching the saucepan back*] I come near gettin' it too hot. [*Pouring milk into bottle, which she gets from cupboard*]

TRAVELER

Let 's name her Joy ! Joy ! [*Musing*] Men give their lives ; women even more. Out of the greater sin springs the lesser, which Thou turnest into blind blessings—clean from the unclean !

PEG

[*Thoughtfully*] Why, every baby ought to be named Joy first, even if it ain't for but a day or so—just to let 'em know how you felt before you plaster Mary-Jane on 'em. Joy, that 's it, Joy. [*Taking the baby*] Hungry, ain't you? Did I forget you? Not a

bit of it—only I found another as starved as yourself that came back to have a bite, too. [*Begins to feed the baby; hearing bells*] I ain't no use for those bells; [*Nodding to window*] they generally wake it up, clangin' away just when the blessed 's asleep.

TRAVELER

Sleeping children are all they awaken.

PEG

[*Slowly walking towards window, cuddling baby*] Golly! There 's a lot of 'em goin' tonight. Ever been in one of 'em? Churches I mean? [*Traveler shakes his head.*] I don't often go; they ain't much use for my kind, anyway.

TRAVELER

What do they do in there?

PEG

Mostly pray and sings and gets talked to. It may be all right, all right; but give me a dime to take me out to Pleasure Park, where I can sit in the grass and sleep under the trees and come home rested. Do you hear? [*As a voice is heard*] That

feller gets paid a lot. Funny, ain't it, how when it 's 'im who give the voice that he can't sing for 'im without gettin' paid. They don't do nothing for love; you can bet these churches is all business. Even ninety-eight cents is marked on the back pews, and the highbrows gets the near-the-orchestra seats with orchestra prices, you can bet.

TRAVELER

[*Raising his hands in appeal*] I wonder had I better go? Is it yet time?

PEG

Lord, no! It ain't time; it ain't ever time for you and me in there, not in these rags. Say, they 'd bundle you out.

TRAVELER

[*Bitterly*] My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!

PEG

Don't take on so; forget it! Look at it, asleep; [*Caressing baby*] peaceful as a kitten in an ash-can. Just you go to sleep in front of the fire, and it 'll

be all right. Never mind what it is—just take my word for it. I 've been up against it, too. It 'll come out all right. [*It is now quite dark, and the wind begins to blow. Peg puts the child in the box, covering it well.*] Blowin' up a storm ! Better throw another stick on the fire. [*Coming towards him*] Some say the wind makes 'em lonesome, spooky kinda, but I like it—it sings around like it was playin'. Hear it sing ! [*Listening*]

TRAVELER

I hear ; but I hear, too, the cry of little children who came, unwanted, and unloved have stayed. Their cries reach me, even though I stop my ears. Oh, the cry of unloved children, unloved children ! And down below they pray ! [*Rising, going to window*] Men and women, on bended knees do mumble o'er Thy name, pausing not to listen to the prayer that Thou dost utter. Hour after hour, year after year, they have heard Thee not. Their voices drown Thine. I speak, they mock me, sneer at me. My first crucifixion was easier, for they knew me not. Now they have forgotten, forgotten, forgotten me, [*The dim light in the room forms a halo over His head.*] forgotten me ! [*Head in hands*]

PEG

[*Approaching him, noticing halo, is frightened. Traveler, raising His head, smiles at her. Peg, dazed, half-aloud.*] The smile ! The smile ! [*Dropping on her knees*]

TRAVELER

Woman of the cleansing mother-love, and men dare call it unsanctified ! Men, their hands still red-dripping with brother-blood, beneath whose thin-skinned religion, the eager excuse for this, all this supreme horror lay but slumbering ! [*Sadly*] Civilized? Too often do they use the word ! Children, children they are, wilfully deaf, dumb and blind !

PEG

And you, who are you, tell me, tell me?

TRAVELER

[*With attempt to control emotion*] I am He who smiled once upon you in your dream. Men do call me Christ. They wait for me ; yet have I come and they in waiting have forgot. They raise churches in my name, where I am a stranger ! They mumble

words and call it prayer. They crush the beauty that was theirs, stamp out the lives that were not theirs to take, all in my name, my name ! The name they have forgot !

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